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**ABSTRACT**

Field research on expectations and goals of community college social science students, faculty, and administration was done to assess the strain a public community college undergoes in attempting both "second chance" education and "cooling out" at the same time. The participant-observation method was employed. Goals identified by students were obtaining high grades so that they could transfer to senior colleges, while receiving basic remediation in regular subject classes and being given full credit for such work. The majority of faculty wanted to grade students relative to national norms, thereby holding up college standards. Most faculty members had previously been employed at senior colleges and did not want to be associated with an institution that had low academic standards, and to that end, they opposed remediation within subject classes and supported separate remediation classes with no credit allowed. The administration's position further articulated the goal dissonance; they did not want grades to be too high, although they were willing to set up remediation courses to keep students. The conflict between "cooling out" (asking low performance students to drop a course) and trying to retain students to justify the college's existence was seen to be acute. (TR)

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## GOAL DISSONANCE IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE: A CASE STUDY

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## GOAL DISSONANCE IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE: A CASE STUDY

We know from organization theory that all institutions have formal and informal levels of actor interaction (Merton, 68). We also have seen that institutions, composed of human groups, often function with segmented goals, some of which may be incongruous (Homans, 50). The fact that these institutions succeed in surviving testifies to the fact that compromises are often made or that some goals are abandoned in favor of others.

The institution focused on in this study is the public community college. At the lowest track in the higher education hierarchy, public community colleges are usually asked to deliver a diversity of services considered "beneath" the four year colleges' functions. These roles include preparing academically poor students for senior colleges, vocational training, remediation, leisure training activities, and "cooling out," a term used by Burton Clark(60) to mean the discouraging of "latent terminals," or those students who it is thought should not seek further higher education (Clark,60; Swift, 76).

A close look at these services shows that some are inherently in conflict. Remediation and "cooling out" fall at opposite ends of the services provided spectrum. One effort endeavors to bring a student up to some standardized level

while the other proposes to discourage him from even trying. Preparation for a vocation is usually considered terminal, while academic preparation within the two year school, brings with it a future at still another institution, the senior college. Leisure education and vocational education are important topics to discuss, however this paper will be limited to the roles of academic preparation, "cooling out," and remediation. The above decision was necessitated by the availability of field work research on the site of the college in this case study.

Even when the number of relevant roles for the study is reduced, it appears that there is still a significant amount of strain, discontent and dissonance brought about by the cross purposes of these three roles. This is the theme of this paper.

Cognitive dissonance is defined:

Two elements are in dissonant relation if, considering these two alone, the obverse of one element would follow from the other. To state it a bit more formally, X and Y are dissonant if not X follows from Y (Festinger, 57, p. 13).

The goals of an institution are dissonant when the sub-groups within the whole unit hold different sets of goals which are mutually exclusive. A further complication is added in the case of the public community college in that some of the goals, or functions of the institution are "opaque" (Clark, 60) to one group and not to another. An example of this is the function of "cooling out," of which the students are generally not aware. Further, if they were aware, they certainly would not agree that this is a legitimate function. Merton's (68) concept of manifest and latent functions is applicable with the understanding that not all actors are equally informed of

this dichotomy.

### Public Education: Historical Background

Historically, the popularization of education has always been a part of the American creed (Cremin, 65). However, often there is a huge difference between what Americans say they believe and the actual ways they behave. The case of public education is illustrative of this point. The first American colleges were created to train an elite. Harvard, established in 1636 had as its original admission requirements:

Whosoever shall be able to read Tully or any other such like classical author at sight, and correctly and without assistance to speak and write Latin both in prose and verse, and to inflect exactly the paradigms of Greek nouns and verbs, has a right to expect to be admitted into the college, and no one may claim admission without these qualifications (Michelson, 72, p. 144).

Obviously, this was not education for the "public." Even the free public grammar schools available in states like Massachusetts by the eighteenth century could only be utilized by those families who could afford to forgo their child's labor (Michelson, 72). Throughout the nineteenth century public education was viewed as a means of creating a civilized and loyal working class (Katz, 68; Michelson, 72). In 1918, Mississippi passed a compulsory education law and became the last state to do so (Cremin, 61). Enforcement, however, was difficult and up until the First World War high school education remained out of the reach of the poor. As late as 1922 George S. Counts wrote, "...the public high school is attended quite largely by the children of the more well to do classes. This affords us the spectacle of a privilege being extended at public expense to those very classes that already occupy the privileged positions in modern society." (Cremin, 61, p. 225)

The community college began to sprout up at the turn of this century. The purpose of this institution, according to William Rainey Harper of the University of Chicago, was to relieve the four year colleges of the responsibility of training freshmen and sophomores who were perhaps not fit for more advanced education. Also, the community college would be a place for those students who did not have the courage to face four full years of higher education (Swift, 76). The first public community college was Joliet Junior College in Illinois, established in 1901, and the first of the California system, Fresno City College, opened in 1910. In 1921 only one third of the 207 two year colleges were tax supported, but they enrolled more than one half the students attending such colleges. By 1976, 95% of the students who attend two year colleges are enrolled in public, tax supported institutions (Swift, 76). The community college, then, is for the most part, public education.

As it turned out the public community college became the "second chance" school for those who have traditionally done poorly in high school and for those who are from a low socio-economic background (Cross, 71). The drop-out rate is high, about two thirds, and of those who do transfer to four year colleges, fewer proportionally receive the B.A. than those who started at four year schools even when test scores and SES are controlled (Karabel , 72). These facts have led critics of the institutions to coin such words as "failure schools," (Karabel , 72), and "revolving doors" (Cross, 71). Even so, enrollment rates seem to be growing. In 1971 the country's 873 public community colleges enrolled 2.5 million students and grew by 15% in the 1960's (Swift, 76).

Students at these schools perceive their education to be the means towards social and economic mobility (Cross, 71).

Case Study: Urban Community College

Field research evidence will now be provided to illustrate the strain the public community college undergoes in its efforts to undertake "second chance" education, and "cooling out" at the same time.

Research Method

Participant-observation was the research method used in this study. The writer was employed as an instructor at the college in question, and through this status position was able to gain entry to the site. Having direct access to the three groups of actors studied, the students, the teachers, and the administrators, this writer proceeded to take detailed field notes. Validity and reliability were established by asking precise questions of the actors, asking the same questions more than once, and observing phenomena more than once before reporting it. Inherent in this method are certain problems which the writer wishes to acknowledge at this time. As a teacher participant, the researcher was not entirely an unbiased observer, although every effort was made to this end. Also, clearly, there were ethical problems, as the subjects of the study did not know of the writer's intentions. <sup>1</sup> Because of this names have been left out, and certain findings necessarily omitted. Although these circumstances did not allow for the optimum data analysis and field research, there are significant findings to be reported.

1. Permission was obtained after data collection.

### The Setting

A new county community college was established in an Eastern state in 1974, with campuses in several cities in the county. The field research reported here took place on one such campus, but the faculty meetings discussed, included teachers from the various campus sites.

The city in which this campus was located was a middle sized city, housing a substantial number of minority and poor citizens. A local private college and a state college were among the local institutions. Neither of these colleges held any national recognition and they mostly served the local population. As a permanent building for the community college had not been built at the time of this research, classes were held at a local high school in the evening and at the state college in the day time. Most of the research reported here was taken from observation of the night school, but one day was spent at the day school. Classes for the academic subjects were heterogenous containing both terminal vocational students, as well as those wishing to continue on to senior colleges. There were some students enrolled in the academic classes who were from other institutions including the state university. No direct observations were made of the vocational classes. Counselors were usually available on a no-appointment-necessary basis, and their offices were generally not crowded, thus, giving the impression that they were in sufficient number to satisfy student needs.

All students in the county would be admitted regardless of past academic record. A high school diploma was not required

for attendance but no student would be transferred to a senior college at least until an equivalency was earned. The fee was \$65 a term which allowed students to take up to five courses if they were not working full time. Many students who were working full time reported, however, that they were enrolled in five courses, so it can be stated that enforcement of this rule was not strict. Facilities were severely limited. The students could make use of the library at the state college, but teachers were instructed not to assign too much library research, as the college administration did not want to antagonize the officials at the state college with too much library use. There were no science labs, hence, no science courses. This fact placed severe limits on the type of vocational programs offered. Data processing, accounting, and other business subjects were the core of the vocational track. This track, by the way, was not thought by the students to be necessarily terminal.

Of those students who had successfully earned an A.A. degree and wanted to go on, most went to the local state college. At the time of this writing, it was not entirely clear how many of these students existed. Records, apparently, were not very well kept and so the estimates differed from 10 to 35. It was clear that we were not dealing with a huge number of successful graduates, at least during the first three years of the school's existence. The total number of students registered was approximately 2,000, however, most were part time, and the drop-out rate was not even kept track of.

The public community college of this study, then, was completely open to the public, attracted mostly part-time

students, and had not enjoyed a very prominent success rate after three years of operation.

### The New Student

The New Student, a term introduced by Cross (71), refers to "those scoring in the lowest third among national samples of young people on traditional tests of academic ability." (Cross, 71, p. 13) These are students who in the past would not have attended college. Nation wide, they are mostly Caucasian, of working class origins, whose fathers did not attend college. However, a substantial proportion are from ethnic, minority groups. These students are distinguished by low test scores more than any other variable including race, sex, and SES. They choose the two year colleges, while those with higher test scores tend to opt for the four year school. Cross used a substantial data bank of almost 130,000 students from four national projects dating from 1960 to 1969 to support her conclusions. She also found that low academic ability and low SES were highly correlated (Cross, 71).

New Students were very much in evidence at this particular community college which we shall now refer to as Urban Community College. Reading levels were generally low as evidenced by the fact that students complained often that their textbooks were too difficult. The administration at this point had not yet put into effect its plan to administer a reading test to all incoming students, so the teachers had to estimate the reading ability of the students. Most of the texts used in the academic subjects were chosen by the instructors individually. The books used by members of the social science department, of which this writer was a

member, were not of the sophisticated variety. Even then, frequent complaints were heard, "I can't read the book," "I didn't understand the chapter." Samples of writing indicated difficulty with grammar, spelling and comprehension, as well as expression of abstract concepts. Although there were exceptions, which averaged about three students to every class of thirty, the academic ability was far below what one would expect to find in an average college freshman class.

Most of the students at Urban Community Collegew were either Black or Hispanic. The age ranged from the early twenties to the fifties, with most of the students in their twenties. Approximately one fourth of the sixty-two students who were asked if they had completed high school, answered that they hadn't. All of these same sixt-two students lived within the boundaries of the city.

### Student Goals

The reason for attendance was repeatedly stated as the way to get a better job. All students in the sample of sixty-two used for specific questions, indicated that a college degree was a definite advantage on the job market. By a college degree, most meant a B.A.. Thus, transferring to a four year college was a prevalent goal. Even though the sample used for these several questions may have been biased by the fact that they were students attending sociology classes, an academic discipline rather than vocational, there was striking consensus of the desirability of transferring to a four year school. Also, several students who stated their interests to be business subjects such as data processing, agreed with the others that a B.A. was their

goal. At any rate, among these students, the goal was very clear, to attend a senior college, obtain a B.A., and either continue on in professional school or simply get a better job by virtue of having better credentials.

Grades, then, were thought to be a crucial indicator as to the students' chances of realizing their goals. Since there were no + or - grades, the difference between an A and a B was taken by the students as quite meaningful. B was considered the lowest transferable grade, so getting less than a B was thought of as a disaster. This desire for high grades was coupled with the need and wish for easy, indeed, remedial work which would not be labeled as such. That is, students did not wish to take remedial courses. Rather they wanted, and at times demanded remediation within the regular course work. An example of such a demand was when one student asked to meet with the teacher before class so that they could go over the "hard" words in the book. Another student asked a teacher if the class could read a chapter in a textbook together so that they could better understand its contents. Such requests were not unusual. Most teachers came to write on the board a great deal to avoid the how do you spell questions. Thus, we can conclude that that the goals of good grades and remediation within the regular subject classes were of primary interest to the students.

Both Coleman (66) and Cross (71) state that grades for traditionally non-successful students are thought to be extremely important to them. In addition, they expect to be judged relative to their classmates, not to national norms. At Urban Community College this was certainly the case. Students expected to be graded relative to their

classmates regardless of the normal population curve. This is an important point because teachers and administrators at Urban College did not always share this view.

### The Community College Teacher

There were eighteen teachers in the social science department. Although there were sixty-eight teachers in all, this description will be limited to the social science department, to which this writer belonged. All of the social science teachers at least held Masters degrees, two were Ph.D.s, and several were A.B.D.s or in some phase of working on a Ph.D. There were three women, and the age range for all of the department was from the late twenties to the early fifties. Most were in their thirties.

Each teacher taught one class only and was paid less than \$800. Therefore, all but one were gainfully employed elsewhere. Most worked as adjuncts or instructors at local colleges, several were employed by public school systems, one did not have any other job at all, and one was a full time graduate student. The chairman was an instructor at a local state college. Most of the teachers had hopes of becoming more involved in this college, possibly as full time faculty, at least for a while.

It may surprise the reader that no one was employed as a full time instructor, but this college had only been in existence for three years and the state was reluctant to allow teachers to accumulate years towards tenure. It is only fair to point out that in the other departments, most teachers taught two to three classes, but for political reasons which are beyond the concern of this paper, the social science

teach at least during that year.

### Teacher Goals

The social science teachers at Urban Community College will be divided into two groups, those who were upwardly mobile and those who were downwardly mobile. Those teachers who regarded their employment at Urban College as a stepping stone to future work at senior colleges are deemed, for this study, upwardly mobile. Those who had worked at senior colleges elsewhere and for one reason or another welcomed a job at the community college level as perhaps more secure, will be called downwardly mobile. Of the eighteen, four were categorized by this writer as upwards (including this writer) and fourteen as downwards. This last group included the chairman.

Attitudes towards the students were very much in line with this dichotomous split. The upward group favored remediation in the subject class, and favored the giving out of high grades. That is, the upward group thought that students should be graded relative to their classmates and be given work appropriate to their level. The downward group, the majority, thought that students should be graded relative to national norms, as best as they could be estimated, and that separate remediation classes be set up for no credit. In the classroom, they wished to see typical college level work. The split was of course not perfect. Two downwards favored remediation in the subject class, but did not wish grades to be relative. Some faculty members did not clearly voice their opinion, but a large enough split in the two groups was present to allow this dichotomous generalization.

Faculty meetings for the social science department reflected this split. On several occasions the chairman stated that he did not want to see too many A's. Most of the faculty agreed with him. Some did not. These were the upwards. The reason given by the chairman was that he didn't want to be embarrassed when students transferred to local colleges. He didn't want them to have A's on their records and then perform poorly at the senior college. This he said would give Urban Community a bad reputation. Standards needed to be upheld. He then warned that all teachers' grades would be reviewed by him. More than one or two A's per class would not be looked upon as proper grading. When one upward stated that it was not at all clear on what basis the senior colleges in the city assigned grades and that this matter should be researched, she was met with cold silence. Even though her fellow upwards agreed with her, as they later stated after the meeting, they were reluctant to stand up against the majority for fear of losing their jobs. Dissention in the ranks was not strong enough to oppose the teacher goals of setting high standards by giving out low grades. On the subject of remediation, the chairman insisted upon keeping standards high by teaching in a manner appropriate to a college class. Plans were being made by him at the time for remedial classes for no credit. He also urged the faculty to "cool out" students who shouldn't be at the college by asking them to drop the class.

### The Administration

The administration consisted of a Board of Directors, a President, and a Dean. The Dean attended all the social science departmental meetings. It is not known whether he attended the meetings of the other departments. His stated reason for attending the social science meetings was that he was a social scientist himself and wished to be of help at these meetings.

Membership on the Board of Directors and the position of President was said to be political appointments made by the county Democratic machine. How this fact actually affected the college is not entirely known, but it was clear that the administration was eager to create a college that would please the local politicians. This included hiring most of the faculty from the county, and not setting up any tenure tracks at that time.

### Administration Goals

The goals of the administration, voiced by the Dean, were to attract as many students as possible so as to convince the taxpayers that the school was a worthwhile investment. This meant keeping the students in the school, through special remediation classes, if necessary, and a great deal of encouragement on the part of the teachers. He didn't want any student to be asked to drop out. On the other hand, he was concerned that high grades be limited only to those students who would do well at the local state college. He did not want students to transfer with A's on their record and then do poorly at the local school.

This position was similar to that held by the chairman of the social science department. It seemed that the reputation of the school was of immediate concern.

#### Summary of Data

The goals of the students were to obtain high grades so that they could transfer to senior colleges, which was a primary objective. Also, they wanted remediation within subject classes and expected full college credit for such work.

The goals for the majority of the faculty was to grade students relative to national norms, and thereby hold up the standards of the college where they hoped to work full-time. Most of the faculty had formerly held jobs at senior colleges and did not want to associate themselves with an institution that had low academic standards. They also, for the most part, opposed remediation within the subject classes and wished to plan for separate remediation classes with no college credit allowed. The reasoning behind this was again, to maintain high academic standards.

A small minority of the faculty agreed with the students that they should be graded relative to their classmates, and that remediation should be obtained within the subject classes.

The administration was interested in attracting and holding as many students as possible, for political reasons. They, however, did not want to see high grades and their stand on remediation was that they were willing to set up classes for this purpose if it meant that more students would remain at the college. However, teacher

encouragement of students and possible remediation within the subject class would have been preferred. as it would have been less expensive for the school to have the subject teacher perform two roles.

Summary Table of Goals

|          | high<br>grades | low<br>grades | remediation<br>in class<br>subjects | remediation<br>in separate<br>classes, no credit |
|----------|----------------|---------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Faculty  |                | X             |                                     | X                                                |
| Students | X              |               | X                                   |                                                  |
| Admin.   |                | X             | X                                   | X                                                |

### Conclusion

The above data has shown that goals of faculty, students, and administration at Urban Community College were dissonant for the most part with regard to grading, and remediation. If one institution is asked to perform dissonant fuctions as are "cooling out," remediation, and "second chance" education, there must be a certain amount of strain produced. To alleviate the strain, compromises must be made. Certainly, more students must be graduated with grades good enough to transfer to senior colleges. Some sort of reasonable compromise on remediation needs to be made so that it won't

take "forever" for a student to graduate. Teachers at this school need to feel more important, and less disappointed in their careers. Full time employment might at least begin to help them with this status problem. It is hypothesized that if the teachers felt more secure in their position, they would feel less threatened by the high aspirations of the students. Finally, the administration would function better if its relations with the political machine in the county was more secure and perhaps more professional as well. The latter problem is a key issue for the future of Urban Community College.

Public education at the community college level must provide students ample opportunity to continue on to senior college if that is their goal. That is not to say that efforts are not being made to this end. The record, however, shows the fact that two thirds of all students who enter public community colleges drop out and on the national average, of those who remain 25-35% transfer to senior colleges. Of those who do get the B.A., most have a higher SES than those who do not transfer (Karabel, 72). What becomes apparent is that "second chance" education does not exist for the majority who undertake it.

Further, the data from this study and from others, (Medsker, 60; Friedman, 67; Medsker and Tillery, 71; Cohen and Brawer, 71), teachers at community colleges are often not happy about being employed there, oppose remediation, and in general may not be relating well to the students. This is obviously a severe problem. A more serious look at community college staffing seems justified.

Finally, education has traditionally been regarded as a means towards upward mobility(Barber,57;Sorokin,59), and is one of the few means for the poor. It is understandable why students equate education and job opportunities in this study and in Cross(71). It is therefore recommended that the open door policy be kept, but that the public community college make more of an effort to keep this from being a "revolving door."

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